THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) No strategic partnership document was signed during the visit to India in December 1998 by the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. However the Joint Press Statement issued at the conclusion of that visit states that India and Russia intend to move towards strategic partnership, which will be confirmed during their next Summit level meeting by the signing of the Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and the Russian Federation.

(b) The close, friendly and time-tested ties with Russia are based on continuity, trust and mutual understanding. Our multifaceted cooperation with Russia is progressing well, encompassing political consultations, economic and commercial relations including in important sectors like power, steel, oil, coal and information technology and cooperation in science and technology, culture, peaceful uses of atomic energy, space and defence. India and Russia have reaffirmed their determination to impart a qualitatively new character and long-term perspective to their multifaceted ties and actively develop them into the 21st century.

(c) Russia has not signed a "Declaration on Strategic Partnership" with China, Japan and other countries in the subcontinent.

Fresh initiatives to strengthen economic ties

2536. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken fresh initiatives to develop and strengthen economic ties with developed and developing countries during the current year;

(b) if so, the details thereof, country-wise;

(c) whether curbs imposed by USA and other developed countries and World/ International organisations have been reviewed recently, if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the details of fresh strategies finalised for the next year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) and (b) The Government attaches high priority to the development of our economic and commercial relations with all countries. India has endeavoured to develop closer economic relations with various developed and developing nations bilaterally as also through various international/multilateral fora. This includes, *inter alia,* meaningful participation, in the activities of World Trade Organisation (WTO), various agencies of the United Nations, SAARC, G-15, G-77 etc. A special effort has been made to enhance India's economic engagement with countries of ASEAN under the ASEAN-India Full Dialogue Partnership. Participation in other regional fora such as Indian Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) and Bengladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) also supports our international economic and commercial initiatives. India's economic linkages with countries in Africa have been strengthened through bilateral dialogues as well as with their regional economic groupings.

In addition, high-level bilateral visits, frequent exchange of business delegations and participation in fairs, exhibitions and seminars as well as Joint Commission meetings and other consultations provide new economic opportunities, which strengthen our ties with various countries.

(c) After the nuclear tests by India, the United States had imposed certain restrictive economic measures. Measures announced by some other countries related mostly to developmental assistance or concessional loans. Some of these countries have variously exempted assistance related to humanitarian, poverty alleviation, food and basic human needs from these measures. G-8 countries had decided not to oppose loans by international financial institutions which are meant to meet basic human needs. In July 1998, the US Congress passed an amendment, called the Agriculture Export Relief Act of 1998 which exempted financial assistance for purchase of food, medicines and other agricultural commodities from the purview of these measures. In November 1998, the US Administration announced partial relaxation of

the measures until October 21, 1999 relating to the programmes of three US institutions namely the EXIM Bank, Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Trade Development Authority (TDA). The US Administration also restored lending by US Banks and resumed their International Military Education and Training Programme (IMET). Further, on February 18, 1999, a World Bank loan for Andhra Pradesh Power Restructuring was approved with some G-8 countries voting for the proposal and others abstaining.

(d) Developing and strengthening of closer economic ties is an ongoing process, and holds a very important place in India's foreign policy objectives. The Government will continue to monitor and evaluate our economic ties with all countries, and to explore opportunities for promoting our trade and investment interests.

PM's statement regarding 'Lost Ground'

2537. SHRI PARAG CHALIHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact as per P.M.'s statement published in press on 1st March, 1999, India treats POK, Siachin and 5000 sqr. Kms. ceded by Pakistan to China as "lost ground";

(b) if so, whether Government treat actual line of Control as Internal Border; and

(c) if so, whether this change means a change between Pokharan-Lahore visit of Prime Minister?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Government are committed to upholding the Constitution of India. The unity and territorial integrity of India shall not be compromised. The Line of Control is not the international border. There is no change in Government's position regarding Pakistan's forcible and illegal occupation of a part of the territory of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Support of G-8 for suspension of World Bank aid to India

2538. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether G-8 its recent meet supported the suspension of the World Bank aid to the country, suspended since the nuclear test till India expresses its willingness to sign the CTBT;

(b) if so, what are the implications involved; and

(c) what is the reaction of Government with regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) to (c) In June 1998, the G-8 countries indicated that they would not oppose the World Bank aid to India meant to meet basic human needs. Loans aggregating US$ 1.245 billion to support seven such projects have been approved by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank since our nuclear tests. Recently two projects not classified as basic human needs have been approved by the World Bank Group. Some of the G-8 countries voted for the proposal while others abstained or opposed. Government is in touch with G-8 countries at various levels and the situation is being closely watched. The Government of India is taking all possible steps to obtain funding support to projects posed by us to different institutions.

Relations with Japan

2539. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state the efforts made to normalize relations with Japan owing to common security concerns?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): There is an ongoing dialogue, at various levels. This process commenced with my meeting with the then Foreign Minister of Japan (now Prime Minister) in Manila in July 1998. Both sides then agreed on the need for resumption of bilateral talks and continuance of private sector and people-to-people contacts. Subsequently, the Speaker, Lok Sabha, met his Japanese counterpart, during a transit halt in Tokyo (October 26); Shri I.K. Gujral, Chairman, Standing Committee on External Affairs met the Japanese Prime Minister, Foreign Minister